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The Rise and Fall of Dynasties as Reflected in Late Medieval German Literature: *Melusine*, *Fortunatus*, and *Huge Scheppel*

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Abstract

In the late Middle Ages, aristocratic and urban circles competed against each other for esteem, legitimacy, authority, and fame. Family chronicles gained significant importance in that process, but we can also identify a definite discourse on dynastic interests in historiographical terms in contemporary literature. This study illuminates in three cases how individual authors conceived of the notion of dynasty and traced the rise and/or fall of their protagonists. Even in the case of an utter demise, the topic itself, the emergence and development of a dynasty, appealed to the wider readership, as reflected in some of the major late medieval German prose narratives and novels. The concept of a mythical origin of the family was particularly attractive, but also the miraculous rise from a low social status to the rank of a king, unheard of in reality, of course.

Keywords: Late Medieval Dynasties, Early Modern Novels, Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken, Thüring von Ringoltingen, Melusine, Fortunatus.

Introduction – Historical Perspectives

The late Middle Ages witnessed a curious development in terms of dynastic and family history. Increasingly, noble families tried very hard, if they could afford it, to establish a trajectory of their dynasty far back into the past in order to legitimize themselves through references to Troy, Rome, or other historical topoi. Major family chronicles were written to demonstrate the historical roots of the dynasty, such as Froben Christoph von Zimmern's (1519–1566) *Chronik* (Jenny 1959; Hurwich 2006), or Philipp Eisenberger the Younger's family chronicle (northern Hesse) covering the period from the fourteenth century and concluding in 1607, when he died, here disregarding some later entries (Bock 2001). Of course, at that time, urban centers and hence urban citizens such as the Eisenbergers increasingly gained in reputation, and they imitated aristocratic culture, bought old castles, restored them, and had them decorated with images depicting figures and scenes in medieval courtly literature – rather parallel to efforts by the Romantics in the early nineteenth century. Noble families, however, fought back and engaged, as we would say today, in a propaganda competition to maintain their traditional role within society (Certin 2023, though focusing primarily on urban chronicles). Most important, the notion of memory, whether made up or real, gained extremely in importance because the individual could preserve his or her identity only if posterity had some materials in their hands to remember the past generations (Müller 1982; Simon und Dombeck 1998 and 1999). It might well be that this phenomenon was

correlated with the profound change in social structures affecting all late medieval society. The economic conditions were also much in favor of the mercantile class, whereas traditional nobility faced an existential crisis and needed to establish or reinvent itself at a time of profound paradigm shifts (Sittig and Wieland, ed. 2018).

Under those circumstances, it does not come as a surprise that hence the history of one's own family gained new importance, such as reflected in the *Flersheimer Chronik* copied down by Laurentius Fohenstein for his patron Bishop Philipp von Flersheim in 1547 who dictated the text to him (Waltz 1874). Traditional medieval romances, by contrast, certainly not the same genre, also commissioned by noble lords, were hardly concerned with dynastic issues, although the various poets assiduously examined the relationships between grandparents and grandchildren and hence the genealogy of the Grail or other royal figures such as King Arthur (e.g., Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Titurel*; anonymous, *Wigalois*, Konrad von Würzburg, *Partonopier und Meliur*, etc.). In most other cases (romances, heroic epics, didactic tales, etc.), the focus rests on the individual protagonist and his/her experiences, but not really on dynastic history. Medieval chronicle literature presented history from Genesis to the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, but it did not mirror any particular interest in a special noble or urban family.

Since the fifteenth century, however, noble and high-ranking urban families increasingly demonstrated great concern with their own family tradition because it provided them with political and ideological ammunition to enhance their social status within a world where the upper classes actually faced dwindling resources and political influence (Spiess 1993). The literary medium was greatly appreciated as a platform for the exploration of the meaning of a dynasty, especially its rise and fall. This could also entail the strong identification with a saint or a martyr as the founder of a family, as was commonly the case already in high medieval France (Bouchard 2014).

The specific contexts and social-political conditions might have been different from country to country, but in essence, we commonly observe the same desire to cement the own dynastic lineage and to have a solid public presence in the form of images, texts, and architecture (Vercamer and Zupka, ed., 2022). As Diana Norman has recognized, public performances, such as tournaments, processions, royal visits, could serve exceedingly well to establish or confirm dynastic interests, such as in Siena (Norman 2018). Both kings and their nobles obviously competed against each other in reserving their own political status and hence in promoting their dynastic interests (Stevenson 2022). In particular, Richard Kinkade has recently uncovered major dynastic interests in late medieval Spanish society that were intimately tied to the production of poetry and similar fictional works, such as by Don Juan Manuel (Kinkade 2020).

We probably face here a global phenomenon (present also in China, India, or the Arab world) with narrative fictions serving exceedingly well for the creation of a propaganda concept concerning the dynasty's legitimacy and fame (*fama*; see Connell 2016, 249–47, for late medieval cases). We can only concur with Pastrnak that princely correspondence, travelogues, financial accounts, chronicles, chivalric or Renaissance poems specifically undergirded marital travels of princely brides and grooms all across medieval and early modern Europe. Pastrnak demonstrates that these journeys were extraordinary events and were instrumental in supporting dynastic and monarchical self-representation (Pastrnak 2024). Family chronicles became increasingly popular across Europe and in nearby regions during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries because urban authors recognized this genre as a

means to enhance their family's standing in a larger historical context (Dunphy 2010), so the genre itself and the global interest in preserving the own family's memory emerged as a contested area of writing among the representatives of the nobility and the urban patriciate.

While dynasties rapidly lost in influence since the rise of early modern industrial production and mercantile activities in the cities, the competition of the various dynastic families among each other was a major factor of public life within virtually all aristocratic circles (Duindam 2016; cf. also Bartlett 2020). Not surprisingly, marriage politics mattered centrally both for the current family and for the future generations since those deeply impacted the further development of the dynasty itself (see the contributions to Srodecki, Kersken, and Petrauska, ed., 2023). We do not need to investigate the role of royal dynasties, such as the Habsburg family (Schubert and Heimann, ed., 2022), even though they pursued fairly similar interests, yet their strategies were much more political in nature and less determined by competition with other families. A major exception, however, would be the all-encompassing efforts by Emperor Maximilian I who utilized sculptures, buildings, manuscripts, literature, and other media to enhance his reputation and the role of the Habsburg dynasty (Geevers and Gustafsson, ed., 2023).

Major dynasties on the territorial level, such as the Wettiner, the Zähringer, or the Wittelsbacher in German-speaking lands (Moeglin 1993), faced, by contrast, considerable challenges in maintaining their status and reputation and relied heavily on public displays, performances, and representative artworks (Rogge 2005/2009; Holzfurtner 2005; Zotz 2018). Efforts to consolidate a dynasty by all kinds of means (chronicles, political offices, architecture, literature, and artworks) can also be observed among lower-ranked local dynasties (Pieper 2019).

Dynasties and the Literary Voices

Using a literary-historical approach, we can identify numerous literary works from that period in which dynastic interests became of central concerns, especially because the various authors, normally commissioned by their patrons, pursued mythical dimensions to confirm the deep roots of the various major noble families. We would have to add a critical analysis of tournaments, heraldry, fresco art in late medieval castles, and the large body of chronicle literature. For the purpose of this paper, however, I will limit myself to a selection of relevant literary documents where the focus rests in an intriguing way on the creation of dynastic myth narratives. We would have to differentiate between commissioned literary texts and narrative documents produced by the members of a dynasty, such as Froben Christoph von Zimmern. Further, it would be important to consider private representations as a form of self-confirmation of the dynasty's legitimacy, tradition, and future, such as interior wall decorations (see, e.g., the famous cases in South Tyrol such as in Bozen; cf. Spada Pintarelli and Smith 1997), in contrast to public manifestations, such as manuscripts (*Ambraser Heldenbuch* produced by Hans Ried for Emperor Maximilian I from 1504 to 1516 [see Klarer, ed., 2019], still a rather private document) and incunabula and early modern prints for the wider book markets. To understand that phenomenon, we would need to keep in mind the intensive interactions between patrons and the poets (Holzknecht 1923/1966; McDonald 1973) who provided artistic or narrative service for their masters' dynastic interests.

The Mythical Mother: *Melusine* and the Consequences for the Dynasty

Already the twelfth century witnessed the emergence of the myth of Melusine, as documented by the floor mosaics in the Otranto cathedral and in the satirical works by Walter Map and Gervasius of Tilbury. However, the literary career of this myth took off only at the

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end of the fourteenth century with Jean d'Arras's prose *Melusine* (1393), Couldrette's verse narrative (ca. 1400), and Thüring von Ringoltingen's prose *Melusine* (1456). Both the French and the German tradition then experienced, having been integrated into the printing program of early modern bookprinters, a tremendous marketing success far into the seventeenth century, and, after a short hiatus in the eighteenth century, also since the nineteenth century. Here we encounter one of the most powerful female founders of a dynasty, Melusine, who is uncannily associated with water (bath, the fountain, the well), which particularly intrigued Romantic writers around 1800.

For countless noble families throughout the early modern age, the reference to Melusine became foundational (*Lüsterweibchen*; see below), probably just because of her mythical nature and odd disappearance into the world of the fairies where she has to wait until the Day of Judgment to be redeemed, after her husband Raymond had transgressed the taboo imposed on him. In a way, Melusine's destiny sheds much light on the formation of all kinds of foundation myths, especially because of her female and her monstrous nature. It goes beyond the scope of this paper to examine all the literary and the visual documentation of the elements establishing the founding power by this mysterious woman, associated with the rise and the fall of the dynasty.

Much recent research has already assisted us in this task, examining the literary tradition, dissemination, and reception of this motif tradition (Urban, Kemmis, and Elmes, ed., 2017; Zeldenrust 2020, whose work is good as a documentation of the wider *Melusine* tradition, but short of critical perspectives; for an overview of older research and a literary analysis, see Classen 1995, 141–62), although numerous questions still need to be addressed especially because the narratives are determined by numerous internal contradictions and mysterious topics. On the one hand, we are informed about the rise of the Lusignan (Cyprus) dynasty; on the other, we also learn of the decline and even disaster of the family, which makes us fear for their future.

For the present purpose, I will focus on the prose version by the Bernese author, the mayor of Bern, Thüring von Ringoltingen (ca. 1415–1483) only, whose novel appeared in 1456 and was copied in fifteen manuscripts until 1491 (the only one with a full title) and published thirty times in print from 1474 until 1587, and then six times until 1700; cf. Gotzkowsky 1991, 105–25; for the records of the seventeenth century, see the VD17, online; for the text edition, see Müller, ed., 1990).

The novel is highly complex and cannot be summarized here in detail. All that matters is that the fairy woman Melusine rescues the young knight Reymond at the worst moment in his life after he has accidentally killed his uncle during a hunting adventure. She immediately promises herself to him as a wife and to preserve his reputation and status if he follows her advice, which is grounded, which calms him down considerably, in the Christian faith. If he were to accept her as his wife, she would make him the most powerful and respectable member of his entire family. However, she also imposes a taboo on him, forbidding him ever to visit her on Saturdays (25).

Although the male protagonist swears an oath, she warns him, unfortunately also prophetically, that a disaster would strike him and his family if he were to break the taboo: "wirt darnach dir an deinen kinden vnd erben vast mißgeen / vnd werdent abnemen an leüt / an land / an eren vnd an guott" (26; everything will fail for your children and grandchildren, and you will lose people and lands, honor and property). But at first, Melusine draws from infinite resources and can quickly establish a huge dynasty for Reymond, as mysterious all

that appears to him, his own lord, and other members of the nobility. She has many castles built, she delivers twelve children, all marked by a monstrous sign, and she and her husband enjoy a splendid life together, although tragedies emerge soon enough, with some of their sons fighting against each other, which ultimately unravels the entire dynasty. Reymond gets so infuriated about his son's Geffroy's fratricide that he reveals Melusine's true nature in public, which hence forces her to leave this world and to return to the existence of fairies, where she will have to wait until the Day of Judgment to recover his human soul. It is not so much his promulgation but the fact that he reveals publicly what he has seen as a result of his breaking of the taboo, gazing through a hole in the door to Melusine's bathroom and recognizing her truly hybrid nature.

Although their children have established themselves in various parts of the world as kings over large countries, they do not fare well and also fail, especially when some of them try to meet a challenge and gain glory. Despite initial success, some of them then go further in their demands and transgress against their aunts who hold the key to the secret behind the challenge imposed by "Awelon" (162; Avalon) on the three sisters, Melusine, Meliora, and Plantine (165). The second, for instance, explicitly warns one of Melusine's sons, Gys, King of Armenia, about the consequences of breaking the taboo: "würt eüch so groß vngeuelle zuo handen geen das auch ewer künigreych das ir yetzo habt auß ewren henden vnd gewallt kommt. das ewer erben weder ir nymer mer bekummen noch überwinden mügent" (160; you will suffer so much misfortune that you will lose the kingdom that you now hold and your power will get lost. Neither you nor your heirs will ever overcome this or recover the loss). The young man, however, disregards the warning, pursues his goal further and thus loses everything in the end, as it had happened to his grandfather and his father, a sorrowful state of affairs within the family over three generations. Each time, the male protagonist gets involved with a fairy figure, at first accepts the taboo imposed by her, but he eventually transgresses it after all, which thus leads to a dynastic fiasco. In fact, in a way, he repeats all the same mistakes, and has to face disastrous consequences for himself and his kingdom. We also hear of Geffroy's death, which is almost parallel to other tragic events, though his transgression concerned the killing of his own brother because he had joined a monastery against his brother's will.

Nevertheless, and this might be one of the critical contradictions, fame and glory result from this dynasty, with the descendants emerging as "beruemt vnd manlich ritter besünder so hat der dichter diß buoches als es in welischer sprach is / der herren einen wol erkant vnd im gedient" (173; famous and outstanding manly knights, and the poet of this book, that was written in French, had known one of those lords well and had served him). The narrator subsequently lists all kinds of kings across Europe whom he identifies in one way or the other as being related with Melusine, the *ur* mother of the entire dynasty, although she had to leave this world due to her husband's failure to observe the taboo.

To understand fully the political dimension, we need to keep in mind how much the narrator finally establishes a global concept of the Lusignan family, directly connected with Melsuine, and hence with the world of fairies: "vnd ist diser stamme also weyt vnd verr verbreyttet jn waelsch vnd teütsche lannd" (174; and this dynasty is disseminated far and wide in France and Germany). The list of rulers is long, extending from England to Bohemia, and as far south as Aragon on the Iberian Peninsula. It would be challenging to untangle the connection between the various French lords of Partenach and Pyarregort (sic; 174–75) and those of Lusignan (Cyprus), and yet, the literary account serves this specific purpose and hence provides the mythological legitimacy for this dynasty.

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Finally, Thüring delves into some reflections about the value of the various literary accounts he and the audience were familiar with (Grail, Arthur, etc.), but the report about the fairy Melusine and her sisters appears to him to be the best of them all: "mich beduncket aller der hystorien keine froemder noch abentewrlicher zesein dann dise besunder so halt ich auch dauon mer dann von den andern allen" (176; it seems to me that this story by itself is the most extraordinary and exciting of them all, and I like it more than all others). In particular, he then builds a direct bridge between the literary account and the genealogical background, connecting the fictional dimension with the historical facts, providing a glorious background for the Lusignan family: "dye vorgemelten grosse geschlaecht alle da her kommen vnd erboren seind / darumb nun das buoch für ein warheit geschriben vnd erzelt werden mag" (176; all the great dynasties originate from there and have been born in that family. For that reason, this book was written and has been presented as a true account).

Ironically, however, despite the glory which both Reymond and his son Geffroy, along with the various other brothers, achieve, transgression happens, the various taboos are broken – a deed which the grandfather Helmas had already committed to the three fairies' mother. And the male heirs – we never hear of female descendants – basically fail when they operate without female direction. They simply repeat the grandfather's fundamental mistake, and they are subsequently seriously punished. All this, however, does not distract from the glory of the mythical background that provided the dynasty of the Lusignans with the desired global fame.

The famous image of the castle of the Lusignans, painted by the Limbourg Brothers Herman, Paul, and Jean for their patron, Jean de Berry, duke of Burgundy (1340–1416), the *Très Riches Heures* (Husband 2008), created between 1412 and 1414, shows, in the illustration for March, a dragon flying around one of the towers of the castle (for a digital copy, see https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7a/Les_Tr%C3%A8s_Riches_Heures_du_duc_de_Berry_mars.jpg), a direct allusion to Melusine who has to leave her husband after he has committed the break of the taboo and flies around the tower three times (123, with the reproduction of the respective woodcut). The splendor of this painting cannot be overemphasized, and hence also the glory of this castle. Even though the dynasty here faces its demise, its fame and respect have been firmly established, as thinly as the negative aspects are veiled, reflecting a deep sense of insecurity and even existential fear. That fear proves to be the result of the realization that the humans (Helmas, Reymond, Geffroy, et al.) have interacted with a half fairy figure and had to accept a taboo, which they ultimately could not maintain (for relevant images and genealogical data, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Lusignan; which is otherwise poorly researched and pretty much out of date).

Nevertheless, dynastic interests found full representation in the vast tradition of *Melusine* narratives. In the subsequent centuries, many owners of castles even incorporated into their interior equipment so-called *Lüsterweibchen*, i.e., candelabra consisting half of a woman's body and half of antlers, certainly a direct allusion to the *Melusine* myth predicated on the idea of a hybrid woman (Classen 2015, 204–05). Although previous research has made many efforts to come to terms with this intriguing novel, the political dimension behind Melusine as a founder of a dynasty seems to have been ignored so far by recent scholarship (see the contributions to Drittenbass and Schnyder, ed., 2010). But just as this candelabrum in its myriad of copies used all over early modern Europe has escaped critical attention (see, however, the useful article online at https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%C3%BCsterweibchen),

so the notion of dynastic strategies still needs to be taken into closer consideration. After all, the concept of memory and of the dynasty mattered critically throughout the late Middle Ages and the early modern age, if not well beyond and even until today.

Fortunatus

It might be strange at first to place this famous early modern novel, *Fortunatus* (printed in 1509, no manuscript available), next to Thüring's *Melusine*, but in both cases we observe relevant comments about the desire to create a dynasty and to establish public reputation. After all, the protagonist is the descendent of non-aristocratic parents and has to go through a long process of suffering to reach a high rank within his society on the island of Cyprus. But he has the huge advantage, after having gone through life-threatening experiences as a result of having been charged of alleged theft of the royal jewels, having been lost in a forest and attacked by a bear, that the allegorical figure of Fortuna offers him a gift of his choice, and he selects infinite amounts of money. That allows him to travel around the world, i.e., all of Europe, and even after he has settled, married, and raised two boys, this *Wanderlust* takes hold of him, so he embarks on another globetrotting trip, this time to Egypt and from there all the way to India (ed. Müller 1990, 383–585). On his way home, he has the opportunity to visit the sultan in Alexandria and to steal from him a magical cap that allows the one who puts it on his head to move to any location in the world he wants to be within seconds.

Two aspects deserve particular attention in our context; first, Fortunatus's interest in establishing a family, or rather a dynasty in Cyprus, and second, his sons' responses and utter failure to uphold his values and to observe his teachings. Although the father admonishes them shortly before his death to work extremely carefully with those two magical objects and never to separate them, his sons, Ampedo (a lazy and self-content bon vivant) and Andolosia (a restless, ambitious, and daredevil individual) disregards his advice and thus, after many major problems, succumb to their deaths. Andolosia is eventually kidnapped, tortured, and murdered by two noblemen who are jealous of him and want to get to the source of his money. Ampedo dies out of grief over his brother's disappearance.

In short, despite Fortunatus's considerable efforts to create a dynasty, he completely fails because already next generation is not willing to obey the rules and to stay content with their social status. In his epilogue, however, the author emphasizes his central concern with this novel, that is, the right choice between the various gifts offered by the fairy Fortuna, wisdom money, physical strength, health, beauty, and a long life (430). Wisdom would have been the only correct decision, but Fortunatus selected money, which thus leads to the ultimate catastrophe involving both of his sons. As the narrator comments: "ain yglicher dem solliche wal gegeben wurde, bedencke sich nit lang / volge der vernunfft vnd nit seinem frechen torechten gemuot / vnd erkyeß Weißhait für reichtumb" (580; everyone who is given such a choice should not think for a long time and follow his reason, instead of his foolish and irrational mind, choose wisdom instead of wealth) (Kästner 1990, 185–93).

Nevertheless, despite various highly dangerous situations, Fortunatus manages successfully to employ his money to travel freely across the world and then, having returned to Cyprus, to settle and establish a family on his own (his parents have died by that time). Not only does he buy his father's house back, he also has a splendid palace built along with a church and other houses for canons to read Masses for him (465–66). Thereupon, he plans on finding a wife, which at first proves to be more difficult than assumed because the origin of his wealth appears to be mysterious and is not grounded in solid family properties or the work of a hard-working merchant. Nevertheless, he does not brag with his money; he does not display openly his wealth, apart from this palace, and through his long travels he willingly

helps a poor maid once a year to gain a good dowry that allows her to marry (Van Cleve 1991, 85–110; here 105).

The aristocracy in Cyprus harbors, however, grave doubts about him and question his financial solidity. When the king encourages an impoverished count Nimian to let Fortunatus marry one of his daughters, we hear explicitly of these concerns since the protagonist does not own a territory and has no subjects, as would be expected from a true lord. In particular, the count worries that the building of the palace might have used up all of Fortunatus's cash and that he could end up as impoverished as his father, who has also not been of noble descent and had wasted all of his money in idle attempts to partake in courtly pleasures (467). Nevertheless, the king assures him that Fortunatus has more than enough money and that he himself would pledge for him.

Nimian's wife agrees with the proposition, although she is troubled by the wooer's non-aristocratic status and lack of regular income through land ownership (468). Nevertheless, the king pushes Fortunatus to marry a noble maid because he would be displeased if his friend were to marry a peasant woman, for instance (469). For the king (and so for Fortunatus), the splendid castle would be wasted if the young man were not to have a wife and start a family, that is, a new dynasty. He chooses the youngest of the three daughters, Cassandra, which irritates her mother who would have preferred to keep that young woman with her; but Fortunatus then gives her such a large monetary gift that she has to consent fully, which thus allows the protagonist to start his family and hence a new dynasty, though this one exclusively based on his financial means gained through the magical purse (474).

Count Nimian finally turns around and accepts his new son-in-law out of respect for his enormous wealth, telling his wife:

> frauw wir seyen mer hye gewesen / vns ist soliche er nye erbotten worden / haben wir uns so ainen gnaedigen künig überkommen oder so ainen maechtigen tochterman / durch vnser tochter Cassandra soellen wir got loben / eer vnnd dancksagen / das er vns solich gnad verlihen hat" (474).
>
> [Wife, although we have lived here for a long time, such honor has never been granted to us. Since we have gained such a merciful king and such a powerful son-in-law through our daughter Cassandra we ought to give praise to God, honor Him, and give Him thanks for having bestowed upon us such grace.]

Although the wedding is then organized with great splendor, Nimian's wife still expresses doubt about Fortunatus because he does not own a territory as it would behoove a man of nobility (476). The protagonist is fully aware of this shortcoming, but he easily compensates for it with money and buys an impoverished count's land and title for seven thousand ducats (477), certainly a huge amount of money. The people voice various opinions about this deal, but the narrator bluntly comments: "wo man gelts genuog hat das man nit tarff sorgen daz gelts gebrest / da mag man wol reichlich vnd kostlich leben on sorg" (477; when a person has enough money and does not have to worry about it, you can live luxuriously and without worries).

We observe hence the establishment and rise of a new dynasty *in statu nascendi*, although we are mostly clearly alerted to the fact that its basis is predicated on an uncanny

source of income. Fortunatus does not even work as a merchant and can rely entirely on the magical purse. The extent to which he subsequently expresses his gratitude both to the royal couple and his new parents-in-law (479) subtly signals that he is fully aware of the precariousness of his new social status and yet continues to rely on his infinite income.

Leaving the second world tour aside, we can turn to Fortunatus's final days before his death when he calls in his sons and gives them his final advice of how to preserve their honor and property (506). He finally reveals the true property of the purse and the hat but warns them never to reveal the secret to any other person, "wann so bald das ain mensch innen wurd / so wurden es darnach mer jnnen / wennen es dann also gar auß kaeme so satzte man eüch nacht vnnd tag zu / so lang vnd so vil byß man eüch darumb braechte" (506–07; as soon as another person learns about it, then other people will know it as well. Once it will become general knowledge, people will pester you day and night and this for so long until they will have robbed you of it). It would hurt badly to fall from riches to poverty – certainly an experience young Fortunatus has had a number of times.

The second part of the novel deals with Ampedo's and Andolosia's lives, first grieving over their father's death, but soon enough disregarding the father's instructions. In particular, Andolosia pursues grand ambitions to rise up to the rank of a respected knight, resorting to his endless amount of money, which then, of course, arouses heavy envy among the other courtiers, which then leads to Andolosia's miserable death. Neither one follows the father's directions, and they do not understand the danger of endless financial resources. They do not marry, and there are hence no new children, which thus brings down the new dynasty very quickly. Thus, the novel concludes with a disastrous outcome since the father's aspirations to establish a new dynasty are utterly crushed.

As the narrator comments at the end, the goddess Fortuna has left this world, so the protagonist's experiences could never be repeated again (580). This also entails that any attempts to buy one's way into the aristocratic circles are doomed to fail, which might represent the poet's wishful thinking reflecting fundamental concerns about the evil impact of money on early modern society (for medieval perspectives, see Grubmüller and Stock, ed., 2005).

Huge Schapler

In the early fifteenth century, the court of the Countess Elisabeth von Nassau-Saarbrücken, a French princess living in that German context, became the center of an intensive translation process the result of which were four early modern novels. Some recent scholars have denied Elisabeth the role of author or translator (Bastert and von Bloh, ed., 2018), but the situation is much too complicated to claim that she was not deeply involved in the process of creating those texts (Haubrichs and Herrmann, together with Sauder, ed. 2002). All these four novels engage with serious conflicts at the royal court under Charlemagne, and *Huge Scheppel* mirrors precisely the same conflicts we have observed above, though the author pursues a different perspective, tracing the life of a butcher's son who through his heroism and chivalry reaches ultimately the highest position as the new ruler of France, creating thereby a new dynasty after the rule of Louis the Pious.

While *Königin Sibille*, for instance, has survived in only one manuscript, *Huge Schapler* experienced a significant success in the early modern book market. The original is available in a manuscript, but it was then printed by Johannes Grüninger in Strasbourg in 1500, 1508, by Bartholomäus Grüninger in 1537, by Weigand Hand in Frankfurt in 1556, and by Katharina Rebart for Kilian Han also in Frankfurt in 1571 (Gotzkowski 1991, 84–88; the

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VD17 does not list any further reprints in the seventeenth century). Huge's parents are of mixed social background, the father a nobleman, the mother the daughter of a butcher. The young man proves his manliness, prowess, and absolute loyalty to the royal house and can thus rise to the highest position despite much envy, jealousy, and hatred. He marries the daughter of the last Carolingian king, Louis the Pious, Merie, and thus achieves all his military and political triumphs.

In his early years, Huge indulges in many amorous adventures from which result numerous bastard sons who later help their father in the fight against evil forces threatening the Carolingian dynasty. Through the protagonist's rise to the throne, he establishes the new dynasty of the Capetians, which proves to be a worthy successor family (Thomas 1971, 176ff.; von Ertzdorff 1989, 212–15). The narrator hastens at the beginning to underscore that Huge did not practice the profession of butcher because he rather followed his father's noble character and life (83). Nevertheless, his mother descended from a butcher; but that man was one of the richest men in France (84).

In a way, the novel's plot and structure prove to be fairly straightforward because the protagonist experiences many challenges but overcomes them all at the end and becomes the new king: "zu leste ein gewaltiger künig in Franckerich wart" (84; finally, he emerged as a powerful king of France) who, with the help of his sons, gains a major victory over the heathens (Muslims) and can thus prove his outstanding knightly abilities and hence leadership skills. At the same time, Huge bestows upon his bastard sons many honors, and material rewards such as castles and cities as their properties (293). After nine years on the throne, Huge passes away and is honorably buried in the monastery of Saint Maglorie that he had founded in Paris. His eldest son Ruprecht succeeds and thus continues with the new dynasty, which, as the narrator confirms, is all recorded "in der franckrischen kronick" (293; in the French chronicle, it is Robert, which is correctly recorded only there; see Bastert and von Bloh, ed., 2018, 353–54). Neither Huge's low origin nor the status of his sons who are bastards – those children he engenders with his wife are not mentioned in particular – matter in this account. Instead, we are presented with the glorious rise of a new hero who knows how to overcome all challenges and to prove his superiority in every respect, which provides him with the desired legitimacy as the founder of a new dynasty.

Conclusion

The question of how to justify and explain a dynasty in historical and political terms deeply concerned as much late medieval authors of fictional texts as chroniclers. Fact and fiction might become confused, but the critical issue was only the mythical dimension of a ruling family. But the authors also pursued different approaches and offered at times challenging perspectives. As both *Melusine* and *Fortunatus* indicate, the meteoritic rise of the head of the new dynasty could also end in a fiasco, but this did not impinge on the glory of the founding figure or the intrigue of the magic that made that rise possible in the first place. Elisabeth voiced severe criticism of Charlemagne in her other three novels (Classen 2021, ch. 5), but this did not prevent her from outlining, after all, the glory of the dynasty in the center of her novels, whether short-lived (*Fortunatus*) or globally disseminated (*Melusine*). In *Huge Scheppel*, the historical interest still dominated, which justified the focus on the protagonist's glorious rise to power and fame.

Dynasties thrive, so it seems considering these three novels, on mythical and magical elements, on wonder and glory. Those could get lost due to betrayal or character weakness,

but the ideal of the dynasty was to stay, as contemporary narratives such as Froben Christoph von Zimmern's chronicle confirms. In a world (late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) where the mercantile culture increasingly dominated, narratives about historical dynasties obviously appealed to traditional value systems, but the catastrophes loomed already very large, as Melusine's and Fortunatus's families indicate.

The contemporary reading audience obviously greatly enjoyed those historicizing narratives and reacted with enthusiasm to the theme of the dynasty, whether it succeeded or failed. The most dramatic illustration for this performative and representative element proves to be the curious candelabrum that can be found in many early modern castles, the *Lüsterweibchen*. The mystique of this hybrid creature hovering above the heads of the inhabitants of early modern castles was almost irresistible (see, for instance, Burg Eltz in western Germany, region of the Moselle, or Castle Bunratty near Limerick, Ireland), offering insights into the world of fairies and providing confirmation of the glory of the own dynastic family. But the intrigue of endless money was also a new factor that could not be overlooked. However, as *Fortunatus* demonstrates, it was not the panacea and could easily lead to the downfall of the entire family if it was not handled rationally and modestly. Traditional courtly values continued to dominate the early modern discourse and sustained the efforts by newcomers to rise to the royal throne (*Huge Schappel*). The value of the dynasty bridging many generations was obviously very present on people's minds and thus deeply influenced the literary discourse particularly at the end of the Middle Ages when the imminent paradigm shift was already noticeable. Reflecting on the dynasty, in whatever form possible, thus facilitated building bridges between the past and the future.

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